Bryan Sykes delves into the burgeoning world of mitochondrial DNA in his exciting book "The Seven Daughters of Eve." He uses a combination of first-hand experience and fictional narration to guide the reader on a journey from the discovery of mitochondrial DNA through his theory of the seven women to which the majority of Europeans can trace a direct maternal connection. The book is for an intermediate-level audience.

So as not to become too heavy, Sykes interlaces the technical language with amusing anecdotes. He continually relates his research in mitochondrial DNA to the real world. He discusses a variety of topics such as the Iceman found in the Alps, Tsar Nicholas II of Russia, Thor Heyerdahl and the peopling of the Pacific islands, the peopling of Europe, Asia, Australia, and the New World. He also talks about the designation of paleo-species, the disappearance of Neanderthals, the emergence of agriculture, Y-chromosome dating, initial migration out of Africa, and opposition to his findings. He does not leave anything out. The chapters read like a rack-list of hotly debated subjects in the discipline today. And, by adequately covering each topic, Sykes' provides the reader at several instances with a feeling of "Eureka," making new connections in the mind of the reader. Toward the end of the book Sykes devotes one chapter a piece to describing the lives of the seven mythical women he found to be the ancestors of the majority of Europeans. While the information is fictional, Sykes includes it to provide the reader with a means of imagining what life must have been like for each of these women. It fosters a personal connection with them, as there is a good chance that a European reader could trace a direct maternal link to one of Sykes’ seven women.
While this technique accomplishes its literary goal quite well, the entire seven chapters are a bit far-fetched for an academic reader. Though he bases his fictional accounts on archaeological evidence and provides an amusing read, the reader should not take them literally. The redeeming quality of all that fiction is the last two chapters. Sykes admits there was nothing spectacular about each woman that made her stand out from the rest of her clan. That is, other than the fact that it was her genes, not those of her contemporaries, which survived through to modern populations.

One downfall of this book is the absence of a bibliography or citations. Though written for the masses, it still would have been helpful to have the opportunity to turn to the back for more sources. In a book which peaks the interest so well, it is unfortunate that Sykes does not provide the reader with a list of additional materials. Overall, this is a very stimulating book. The reader is drawn into the material. This, combined with the fact that the book is so well researched and well written, makes this a rather quick but fascinating read.